

Book Review

Tempos de Capanema, by Simon Schwartzman, Helena Maria Bousquet Bomeny, and Vanda Maria Ribeiro Costa. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1984, 388 pp.

Ivan Jaksic, *Comparative Education Review* 30, No. 4 (November 1986): 617-618.

Gustavo Capanema, the loyal Minister of Education and Health in the administration of Getúlio Vargas between 1934 and 1945, presided over some of the most significant educational transformations of modern Brazil. This book, which is largely based on Capanema's personal archives, is more than a biography and reveals the authors' interest and expertise not only in the period known as the Estado Novo (1937-45) but also in the entire first Vargas administration (1930-45). That was a time when Brazilian society and politics underwent a momentous change because of the advent of Getúlio Vargas to power. Vargas gave Brazil a strong national government that by 1937 had acquired a distinct authoritarian character. Yet he gave the country a sense of national purpose and expanded federal activity in an unprecedented number of new areas of Brazilian society.

One of these areas was education. Under the leadership of Gustavo Capanema, the Ministry of Education centralized all levels of educational activity, providing supervision and government control for an area that was to prove crucial for advancing the aims of the Estado Novo. Education, it was hoped, would provide a sense of nationality to a country that was in large part composed of immigrants.

The authors devote one of the most important parts of their book to examining this government-promoted idea of nationality. On the basis of the official publications of the time, as well as the contents of civic and moral education courses, the authors suggest that nationality meant an emphasis on patriotic values, Catholicism, the Portuguese language and the seclusion of ethnic minority groups and religions. This idea of nationality also allocated different responsibilities for the sexes, maintained class divisions, and was bent on providing a cultural uniformity that, due to the diversity of Brazilian society, was highly repressive. This is hardly a flattering portrayal of the educational aims of the Estado Novo, yet the authors probe into the historical circumstances that led to this authoritarian conception of education. The Vargas administration, they indicate, opened the Brazilian political system to a new class that attempted to modernize the country within the framework of a conservative ideology. To succeed in their designs, they centralized power and attempted to instill a sense of nationality into the larger population. The wartime period and the existence of a significant immigrant population underscored the perceived need to provide uniformity to the nation for reasons of national security. They were not successful in all of their aims, but Capanema in particular managed to furnish the groundwork for many educational reforms and

institutions, as well as a sense of national educational purpose that the authors find to be very much needed in Brazil today.

The authors provide a thorough, well-researched rendition of the educational policies of the first Vargas administration. Their major success lies in establishing a link between the aims of the state and those of Capanema's ministry. Their work is fundamentally a work of history, but the implications for education will not escape CER readers who are interested in researching the educational policy of a highly centralized political system. Brazilianists in particular will benefit from the new information about many of the leading Brazilian intellectuals and politicians of the time that is contained in this volume, including Capanema's unpublished correspondence. But readers in general can look on this volume as perhaps one of the better sources for studying Brazilian educational policy and ideology under Vargas.